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## CHAPTER 9

# Depicting Scotland: Scotland in early films

*John Caughie*

In *Distant Reading*, Franco Moretti poses the problem for the historian of world literature:

Knowing two hundred novels is already difficult. *Twenty thousand?* How can we do it, what does 'knowledge' mean in this new scenario? One thing for sure: it cannot mean the very close reading of very few texts. . . . A larger literary history requires other skills: sampling; statistics; work with series, titles, concordances, incipits.<sup>1</sup>

For Moretti, 'the trouble with close reading (in all its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon'.<sup>2</sup> The solution that he proposes is 'distant reading' where distance is 'a condition of knowledge': learning how *not* to read the 0.5 per cent of texts that constitute the canon of nineteenth-century novels in favour of a sampling from the other 99.5 per cent through tracing systems, patterns, movements and mappings.

For the historian of early cinema, the problem of the number of film texts is compounded by another problem: the problem of survival. In a report for the American Council on Library and Information Resources and the Library of Congress, David Pierce calculates that of the 10,919 feature films produced in the United States between 1912 and 1929 only fourteen per cent still exist in their original format and another eleven per cent exist in foreign-release versions or in inferior formats.<sup>3</sup> So for American cinema, and for world cinema more generally, the question is not simply of knowing eleven thousand feature films but of knowing eleven thousand films of which seventy-five per cent no longer exist. For early Scottish films and Scottish-themed films the numbers are much lower (about two hundred fiction films, and many more 'scenics' and 'topicals') but the extinction rate is a great deal higher: rather than forming a canon the films that are available for viewing or screening

constitute a survivors' list; treasured because they have survived rather than because they are 'great'.

The solution that I have adopted in charting Scottish-related films from 1908 to 1927 is not so much 'distant reading' as 'remote reading': in a period before the practice of film reviewing or film criticism had been established, my 'knowledge' of the films is acquired remotely from a reading of the accounts of the films and the synopses of the plots delivered in the trade press, or occasionally in the local press where 'reviews' were customarily written by exhibitors for potential paying audiences. The focus of the trade accounts tended to be advisory for potential exhibitors – *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1923) is 'Purely a title booking that may get over with suitable music and effects'<sup>4</sup> – or on marketing and exploitation: for *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1923),

Bagpipes, even in an English town, always attract a considerable amount of attention, and you might do well to have a man attired in full Highland dress wearing a Stuart tartan parading the streets with his instrument a week or so prior to your screening. He could be accompanied by a boy also in Highland costume, who could distribute handbills regarding the showing of the picture.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to say that the trade accounts were completely void of a critical vocabulary, and the traces of an aesthetics of atmosphere and authenticity do emerge, but critical judgement seems principally directed towards what a paying audience will value or tolerate. While one may regret the absence of the films themselves on which criticism depends, remote reading offers a route to understanding the ways in which Scotland was represented – and marketed – in early cinema: like distant reading, the remoteness is a condition of knowledge. It allows us to see the commercial attractions of Scottishness – or, more appropriately for the period, 'Scotchness' – and where Scotland sat in the world market of images.

As is argued in the previous chapter, what is striking in scanning the trade press in Britain and the United States is that while the cinema industry – its mode of production and distribution, its appeal to the democratic audience – is modern, a great proportion of its early films appeal to a society that is still imagined as premodern. Scotland fits quite comfortably into this imaginary past. It is not singled out as a premodern state, isolated from twentieth-century modernity, with an antique and romantic past. Rather, this imagined Scotland is part of a pattern of representation in early popular cinema which, until the urban realism of the 1930s, is still rooted in nineteenth-century literature and culture. The gypsies, fisher-folk and squires of early American cinema are as much a

cultural anachronism in the twentieth century as the kilts and glengarries of Scotland.

Scottish audiences, like American audiences, did not necessarily receive these images passively, and did not necessarily confuse cinematic representations with national or cultural identity. In 1917, the Scottish correspondent for *The Bioscope* writes:

I am going to advocate that every American producing company which attempts to produce a Scottish picture should have a Scotsman on their staff to keep them right as to what is the correct wear for the ladies and gentlemen of the land o' cakes. We do not all wear kilts and Glengarry bonnets . . . We have had *Peggy* [1916], now are given *A Daughter of Macgregor* [1916], and, in the near future, are to have Mary Pickford in *The Pride of the Clan* [1917], and the Scottish dress in each will be a laughing stock to every Scottish man and woman who sees them. As Mr Waddell would say, 'The worst of it is that we know they are doing their best'.<sup>6</sup>

Representations of Scotland in early cinema, and indeed of England or the United States, are most commonly a kind of romance, inhabiting an imagined land in which received images are played out as masquerade. The question that this poses, of course, hangs over the point at which this imagined land becomes, in Benedict Anderson's terms, an imagined community, in which people recognise, or misrecognise, themselves as a nation.

Scotland is prolifically, and sometimes notoriously, represented in early cinema. The works of Walter Scott were staples for European and American companies, and the romance of Scottish history – Mary Queen of Scots, Rob Roy and Bonnie Prince Charlie – became part of the diet of global cinema; 'Scotch' comedies and comic sketches featuring kilts, bagpipes, Highland cows and whisky (usually in combination) follow the popularity of music hall and Harry Lauder; and 'Scotch songs' like *Annie Laurie* and *Auld Robin Gray* were part of the international repertoire in parlour singing which could form a pretext for a film. Some geographically unfixed and temporally dislocated 'Highlands' became the location for a whole corpus of 'Scottish' films, and the relationships between wild Highland maidens and the refined gentry of London and New York, or between metropolitan ladies and untamed Highland squires, formed the 'border-crossing narrative' of many English and American romances.

This points to the paradox that may make Scotland truly distinctive in early cinema: compared with other small countries where cinema was being invented and developed as a narrative form, Scotland had a world literature, and, in some sense, a world popular culture. In the

English-speaking world and for much of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Sir Walter Scott is a world literary figure, rivalled only in English by Dickens and Shakespeare: an influence on Hugo and Dumas; on Jules Verne, with three of his novels set in Scotland; translated into opera in Italy; and, for Ralph Waldo Emerson, Scott was ‘the delight of boys’, whose aristocratic sensibility was tempered by his democratic humanity.<sup>7</sup> Notoriously, Mark Twain blamed Scott, and particularly *Ivanhoe*, for the outbreak of the Civil War: ‘Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.’<sup>8</sup> Common readers in English, as part of their patrimony in the English-speaking world, were familiar not only with *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy* but also with *The Lady of the Lake* and *Marmion*. Scott, along with Robert Burns, and later joined by R.L. Stevenson and J.M. Barrie, placed Scotland, small in size but disproportionately large in world literature, within an internationally shared reading culture. They provided a shared narrative heritage for the new generation of cinema-goers, but also a repository of stories and settings and historical romance, some of it copyright-free, that could be adapted and filmed as easily in Rome, Los Angeles or London as in Aberfoyle or Kirriemuir. Similarly, at a time when parlour music was an important domestic entertainment, *Comin’ Through the Rye*, *Annie Laurie* or *Auld Robin Gray* were sung by people who had never set foot in Scotland. The paradox is that in early cinema, with the growth, first, of England, France, Italy and Germany as dominant forces within Europe, and the growth, later, of Hollywood as the dominant world force, there is a tension between having an internationally available world literature and having an indigenous and sustainable film industry. Scottish producers did not successfully exploit their own literary heritage or their own popular history precisely because it was internationally available and because better capitalised producers, hungry for ‘content’, had already exploited it from elsewhere.

Scenic films were an established category in film production, renting and exploitation. By the 1910s and 1920s, the short ‘scenic’ was an expected part of the standard programme in cinemas around the world, which included comedies, newsreels, local topicals and a feature film. Table 9.1 gives an illustrative list of the diversity of Scottish subjects covered as ‘scenics’ by a range of British and international production companies.

This list of scenics, filmed in Scotland and produced by companies such as Kineto, Urban, Barker, Pathé and Gaumont, is by no

**Table 9.1** Examples of early Scottish scenic films

Year	Film title	Production company
1910	Travelling Through Scotland	Urban
1910	A Holiday in the Highlands	Barker Motion Photography
1910	The Island of St Kilda	Pathé
1911	Scenes from Bonnie Scotland	Milano
1911	Scenes in Shetland	Urban
1911	High Scotland	Nordisk
1911	Motoring Over Ben Nevis	Kineto
1911	Highland Games at Oban and Dunoon	Kineto
1911	Gems of Scottish Scenery	Gaumont
1912	Herring Fisheries at Loch Fyne	British and Colonial
1912	Scenes in the Land of Bonnie Prince Charlie	Clarendon
1913	The River Clyde	Pathé
1913	A Trip Through the Highlands of Scotland	Pathé
1913	Oban on Regatta Day	Kineto
1913	In and Around Scotland	Kineto
1913	Rambles in the Inner Hebrides	Kineto
1913	The Lowlands of Scotland	Kineto
1913	The Bonny Isle of Skye	Kineto
1913	Through the Caledonian Canal	Kinemacolor
1913	Highland Waterfalls	Gaumont
1913	Beauty Spots and the Highlands	Gaumont
1914	Scottish Scenery	Gaumont
1914	Haafnet Salmon Fishing	Dart
1914	The Historic Borderland and the Home of Sir Walter Scott	Kineto
1914	Prince Charlie's Country and the Western Highlands	Kineto
1914	Herring Fishing	Pathé
1914	Scenes in Highlands of Scotland	Turner
1914	Scottish Shepherds at Work	Turner
1915	Historic Stirling	Pathé
1915	Mountains and Glens of Arran	H&B
1915	A Trip up the Clyde	Kineto
1916	Around Braemar in Bonnie Scotland	Éclair
1917	The Western Highlands	Kineto
1918	Glimpses of North Scotland	Kineto
1921	The River Clyde from its Source to the Sea	Square Film Company
1922	A Tour Through the Land of Burns	Gaumont
1924	The Love Isle	Ideal
1924	Bonnie Scotland Calls You	Scottish Film Academy
1925	Highland Games	Stoll
1925	A Trip to the Beauty Spots of Scotland	H.E. Hayward
1926	The Open Road	Claude Friese-Greene
1927	Scottish Historical Pageant	Pathé

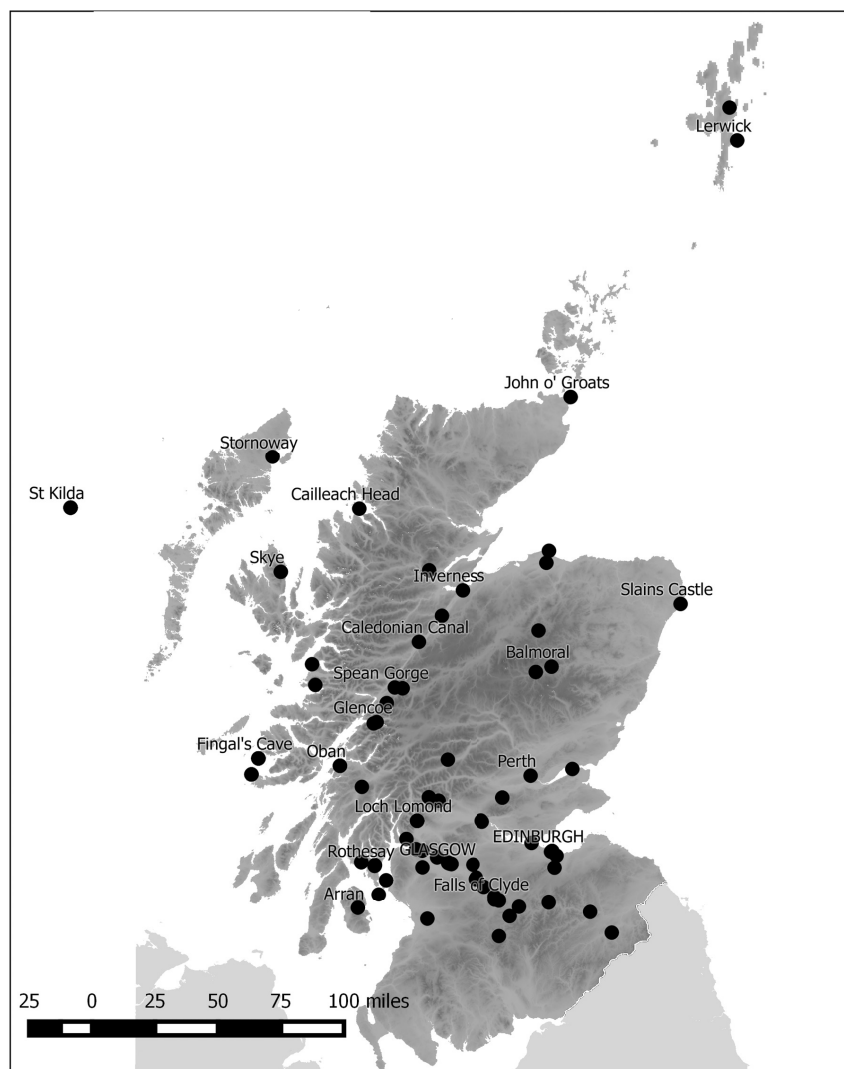


Figure 9.1 Locations of scenic films given in trade reviews.

means comprehensive. Many more titles appear in the trade press in both British and American trade journals. It is rather an indicative list, based on titles that were reviewed or noted in *The Bioscope* between 1910 and 1927 on the basis of trade shows. The titles give some sense of the particular attraction of the place, and the map below shows the locations which can be drawn from most of these reviews. The map, however, shows only locations that are specifically mentioned in the

reviews, and does not include broad areas indicated in such films as *Glimpses of North Scotland* (1918) or *Scenes in the Land of Bonnie Prince Charlie* (1912).

Scotland as a scenic landscape preceded, and may have informed, the production of Scotland as an imaginative landscape by Scott and later novelists. Most famously, Thomas Pennant toured Scotland in 1769 and again in 1772,<sup>9</sup> Boswell and Johnson toured in 1775,<sup>10</sup> Robert Burns in 1787,<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Diggle in 1788,<sup>12</sup> and Dorothy and William Wordsworth in 1803.<sup>13</sup> In the earlier part of their tour, the Wordsworths were accompanied by Coleridge, and in the latter part, in what would become 'Scott country', by Walter Scott. These were the most celebrated of more than thirty published accounts of travels in the Scottish Highlands between the middle of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth, which varied from scientific and ethnographic accounts to the reminiscences of her life in the Highlands by Queen Victoria,<sup>14</sup> or to the tour taken by J.M.W. Turner in 1831 for his paintings and watercolours for Scott's *Poetical Works*.<sup>15</sup> Pennant's extensive tour of 1772, on which he was accompanied by a botanist and a Gaelic-speaking minister, was dedicated to Joseph Banks. He had corresponded with Linnaeus and met Voltaire, and, as a traveller in the age of Enlightenment, his travels are part of an attempt to understand better the natural world and natural history. Other tours may have been more romantically inspired by Burns, Scott and Byron, and to some extent replaced the fashionable grand tours of Europe at a time when Europe was riven with international wars and national revolutions.

These tours begin to map Scotland in a way which is replicated in the scenics of early cinema. Johnson's tour, like Pennant's, is an enlightenment tour. He visits the major cities and their universities, stays with landed gentry and visits such notables as Flora MacDonald at Kingsburgh on Skye, recording her charms in such a way that confirms the suspicion that he was, at heart, a Jacobite. Pennant had also stayed with the MacDonalds at Kingsburgh, but was more impressed by the antiquities shown him by Mr MacDonald than by the charms of Flora. Like Pennant, Johnson develops an almost anthropological account of the Western Islands: agricultural methods, the clan system, life expectancy, post-1745 disarmament, dining habits and female beauty. Though, like Pennant, he is less concerned with landscape than with people, he maps a topography which becomes familiar.

Predictably, Dorothy Wordsworth's recollection of the tour she made with William is romantically, rather than scientifically, inspired, though she is astute in recording the people she meets and the more humble



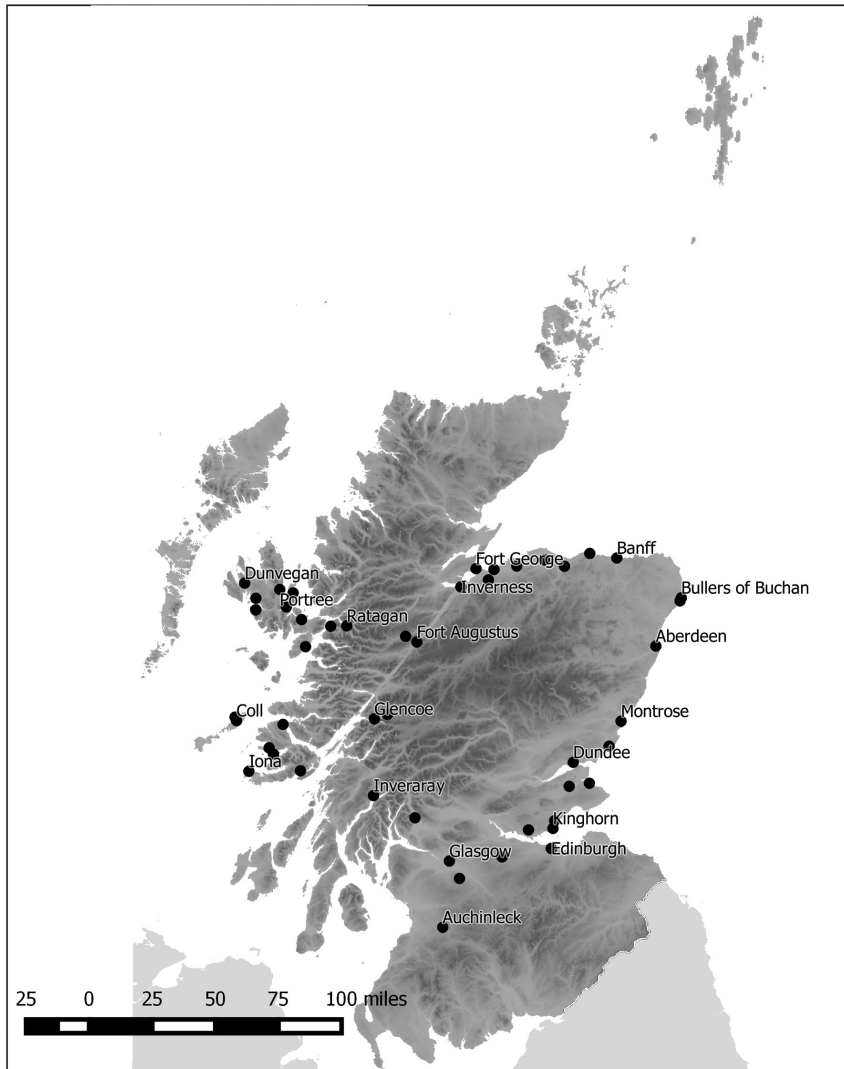
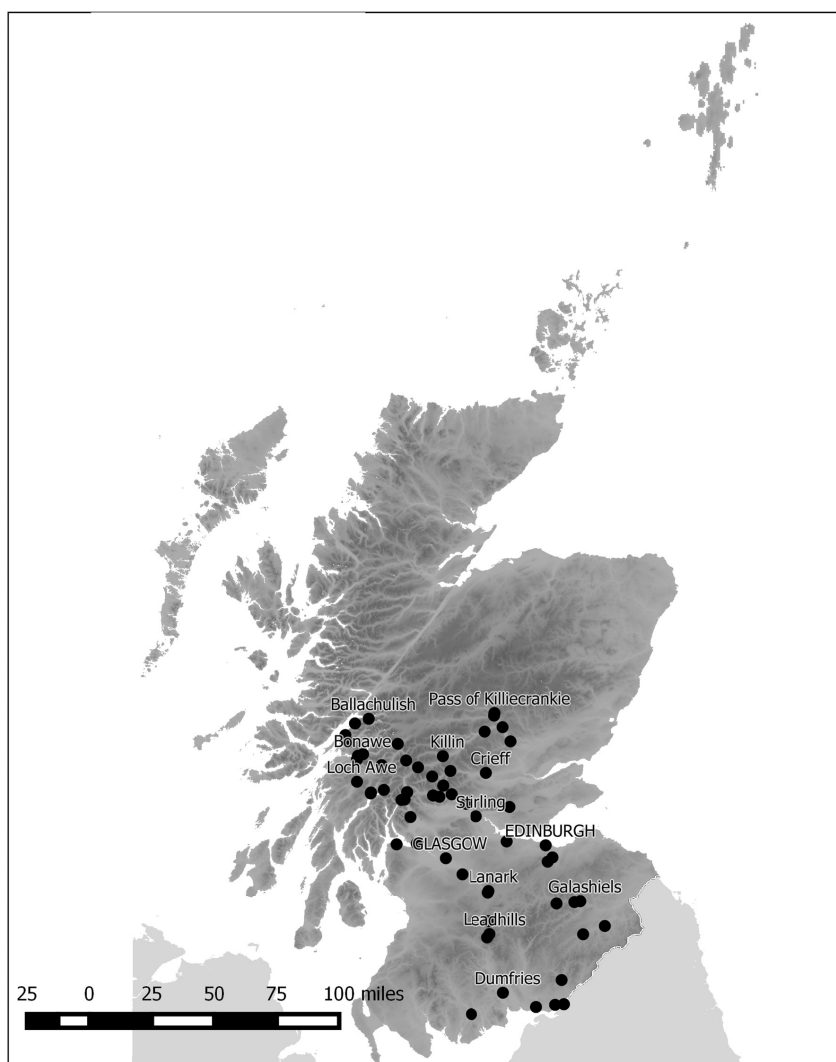


Figure 9.2 Places mentioned in Samuel Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775).

living quarters in which they stay. Dorothy and William are constantly drawn back to the Trossachs, passing through parts of it two or three times, and they stay not with the landed gentry but in wayside inns or with Gaelic-speaking 'natives'. (Even in the Trossachs, thirty miles north of Glasgow, Gaelic seems to have been the dominant language.) Constantly comparing Highland Scotland with the Lake District they know, there is a real sense of strangers in a strange land. '[W]e', says



**Figure 9.3** Places mentioned in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland, A.D. 1803*.

Wordsworth in 'Stepping Westward', 'who thus together roam, In a strange Land, and far from home'<sup>16</sup> – a land as strange, indeed, as North America. 'What I had heard of Loch Lomond', says Dorothy, 'had given me no idea like what we beheld: it was an outlandish scene – we might have believed ourselves in North America.'<sup>17</sup> They visit Rob Roy country and see his grave, but this is fifteen years before Scott wrote his novel and

Rob Roy was still remembered as a folk hero: 'We mentioned Rob Roy', she says at Loch Katrine,

and the eyes of all glistened; even the lady of the house, who was very diffident, and no great talker, exclaimed: 'He was a good man, Rob Roy! He had been dead only about eighty years, had lived in the next farm, which belonged to him, and there his bones were laid.'<sup>18</sup>

What makes Dorothy Wordsworth's account most interesting is, firstly, that she is by far the most sensitive in her descriptions to landscape, and to landscape in its wildness rather than Pennant's or Johnson's interest in 'improved' landscape as cultivation. Of Loch Lomond, she says,

The whole was indeed a strange mixture of soothing and restless images, of images inviting to rest, and others hurrying the fancy away into an activity still more pleasing than repose. Yet, intricate and homeless, that is, without lasting abiding-place for the mind, as the prospect was, there was no perplexity: we had still a guide to lead us forward.<sup>19</sup>

And of Glencoe she expresses a little disappointment, shared with her brother:

we found that though the expectations of both had been far surpassed by the grandeur of the mountains, we had upon the whole both been disappointed, and from the same cause: we had been prepared for images of terror, had expected a deep, den-like valley with overhanging rocks.<sup>20</sup>

The eye is pulled upwards towards the still majesty of the mountains, while her preferred landscape is drawn to waterfalls and gorges, to nature in movement rather than nature at rest: a Scotland of the sublime and the imaginary which the physical Scotland can only reproduce occasionally, and which her language can only reproduce in the familiar vocabulary of the Sublime, 'restless images' and 'images of terror'.

Like the Wordsworths, early scenics share the fascination with waterfalls and gorges. There is a film on *Highland Waterfalls*, and the Spean Gorge and the Falls of the Clyde are points of constant return. Nature in movement is indeed the proper matter of moving pictures. Where cinema has difficulty, however, is with Dorothy's 'sublime' fascination with the changing light of the weather, and with the romanticised landscape, characteristic of nineteenth-century landscape painting, dominated by cloud and sky. Early cinema can only reproduce this sublime mechanically, chemically, in ungraded blacks and whites and in frames that might shake and might suffer from frequent use. Technically, early 'blue-sensitive'

film stock and filters cannot capture the effects of clouds, and the romantic epiphanies and fantastic imaginings of poetry and painting are washed out in an even greyish white. The landscape of early scenics becomes referential to an imaginary sublime landscape that it cannot reproduce, a record of where the sublime might be, but in a cinematic language, a little like Dorothy's prose compared to William's poetry, which cannot yet quite represent the unrepresentable.

Importantly, in place of a language of the sublime, Dorothy Wordsworth seems frequently to use the trope which in film would later be called the cutaway: she cuts away from the landscape to root it in some detail of everyday life. At Wanlockhead, they meet three boys, one with a fishing rod, all with honeysuckle in their hats: 'I cannot express', she says, 'what a character of beauty these few honeysuckles in the hats of the three boys gave to the place: what bower could they have come from?'<sup>21</sup> The force of the place is condensed in its inhabitants, a frequent trope of scenics and travelogues which constantly jump between the landscape and the details of everyday life – the local peasantry, children playing or maybe just Highland cows. This cutaway or condensation to human dimensions was anticipated by her brother in poems like 'Stepping Westward', 'To a Highland Girl' or 'The Solitary Reader'.

My argument is that the scenic in early cinema is drawn to locations that are already imbued with romance and imagination and are memorialised in an earlier travel literature. Technically, it cannot represent the sublime landscape or capture its romance, but it can reference it: a topographic marker for an imaginary landscape that has been memorialised elsewhere. By the beginning of the twentieth century, many of these landscapes had been mapped by a travel literature that can be traced more directly to Thomas Cook's tour of 1846 and to subsequent travel guides, but the memorialisation of the rural landscape owes something to the tours of Johnson and Wordsworth, and to the many literary accounts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is there that not only are the locations established and the imaginary landscape mapped, but also that some of the grammar of observation is written. What is striking, at the beginning of the twentieth century and at the height of Scotland's industrial world power, is that industry is simply missing. While the Clyde is celebrated in scenics, the camera is drawn to the upper reaches and to the Falls of Cora Linn or Boniton or to the Firth of Clyde opening out into the Argyllshire Highlands. Only Claude Friese-Green's *The Open Road* (1926) passes through the industry of the shipyards on its way to the open estuary and Loch Lomond. Unlike the films of the documentary movement from the 1930s that celebrate heavy industry,

what Scotland brings to the international screen in the 1910s and 1920s is rural or coastal livelihoods and a landscape that has already been imbued in refined and popular travel literature with romance, imagination and the sublime.

For its fictions, some of that common culture on which early cinema draws is not the narratives of literature but the familiar lyrics of poetry and song, a poetry made internationally familiar both through Burns and Scott and transmitted to popular verse and parlour music: *Auld Robin Gray*, for instance, or *On the Banks of Allan Water*. In the filmography, there are twenty-nine adaptations from songs, lyrical poems and narrative poems. In some instances, a narrative poem may provide the outline of a fiction which is adapted more or less literally: *Young Lochinvar* and *The Lady of the Lake*, for instance, provide the story, and *Young Lochinvar* is adapted as a historical romance, as a comedy or as a 'modern' story six times before 1927. Rather more typically, however, a popular song like *Auld Robin Gray* is the pretext in 1910 for a narrative about an old man about to marry a young woman when her young lover returns, is then readapted to be a story of the First World War (1917) and then is given a sequel in *The Master of Grays* (1918). *Annie Laurie* begins life in 1913 as a tale of the American Civil War in which the song itself provides a motivating narrative link; is reset in Scotland as a rural romance by Hepworth in 1916; becomes a Great War story in *Bonnie Annie Laurie* for Fox in 1918, and ends up in 1927 as a story of the Glencoe Massacre by MGM, with Lilian Gish, as Annie Laurie, almost but not quite stopping the massacre. Familiar poetry or song, therefore, becomes a pretext, appealing to familiar lyrics, or even just a familiar title, as part of a common culture: a commonality in which the titles and, perhaps, the spirit, form a currency of exchange, and a culture so common that it may be dislocated geographically from its context. *Comin' Through the Rye*, for example, adapted by Hepworth in 1916 and again in 1923, becomes a classic English bucolic. (The appropriation of lyric titles as points of reference to a shared culture is still common: Ken Loach, for example, titles his 2004 Glasgow romance *Ae Fond Kiss*.) Importantly also, however, in a so-called silent cinema, the songs become the key and distinctive element of the musical accompaniment. The trade show of *Annie Laurie* in 1916 is advertised with appropriate music accompaniment: 'Miss Kate Holbrook, of the Royal Opera House, has been engaged as soloist for the occasion.'<sup>22</sup> For *Young Lochinvar* in 1924, exhibitors are encouraged 'to dig up the famous poem which bears the same title as the film, and which we believe is being made into a song'.

Have a chat with your musical director regarding this, and, if possible, arrange for a number of Scottish melodies to be played, giving your patrons a small multigraphed slip on which they should enter the names of the various selections played.<sup>23</sup>

The appeal of adapting songs and poems, then, is not simply a commercial opportunity to tap into a common frame of cultural reference, but is also a means of engaging the community, offering them the possibility of ‘singing along’ to a familiar song, of participating in the show, keeping alive the inheritance of variety and music hall which is part of the experience of cinema-going in cinema’s early decades.

Adaptation from novels and successful London or Broadway plays provided a ready-made store of narratives that early cinema exploited, sometimes repeatedly and sometimes mercilessly. On my count, of the 222 fiction films listed in the filmography, forty-four are adapted from novels or short stories, and twenty-four are adapted from theatre plays. *The Little Minister* was adapted four times in the silent period before the famous Katherine Hepburn version of 1934, and within the period there were nine versions of *Macbeth*, the ‘Scottish play’: two from Germany, two from France, two from England, two from the USA and one from Italy.

It is interesting to note the spectrum which these adaptations cover, from the historical romances of Scott and his European counterparts, Balzac (*A Calvinist Martyr* (1913)), Heine (*William Ratcliff* (1909 and 1922)) and Schiller (*Maria Stuart* (1927)), to the more parochial landscape of J.M. Barrie, S.R. Crocket and Ian MacLaren. It is also interesting to note what is missing: while Scott is clearly a central figure, his central novel, *Waverley*, was not adapted (and has never been adapted), and *Old Mortality* is also missing. The ambivalence of the young hero in both novels may have blunted the edge of the romance. Similarly, though *Treasure Island* (1912), *The Suicide Club* (1914), *The Bottle Imp* (1917) and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1920) were all adapted from Robert Louis Stevenson, his quintessential Scottish Jacobite novel, *Kidnapped*, was adapted by Edison in 1917 but does not appear to have been released in the UK and does not become part of the canon of ‘Scotch’ films.

It is also important to recognise that many of the adaptations are from play versions of the original novel. *The Little Minister* of 1921, for example, was an attempt to exploit the success of the theatre adaptation at the Haymarket Theatre in London and on Broadway. Many of the other titles of the 1920s were themselves adaptations of adaptations: films adapted from stage plays adapted from novels or short stories. As one might expect, production companies were attracted to stories that

had already demonstrated that they could attract popular audiences, and that could quite easily, appropriately and economically be translated from a stage set to a studio set. Aesthetically, this seems to return film to the theatrical tradition, the narrative turned from the novelistic to the dramatic and the theatrical. Film scripts were commonly still referred to as 'dramatic plays'. For Scott, as subsequently for Dickens, this meant an emphasis on the dramatic or melodramatic action and on dramatic types like Meg Merrilees, Jeanie Deans, Bailie Nicol Jarvie and Rob Roy himself, rather than on the voyages of discovery and transformation of Frank Osbaldistone, Henry Morton or young Edward Waverley.

Finally, and most dramatically, of the forty or so adaptations of Scottish literature and Scottish stories reviewed in *The Bioscope*, only one was produced by a Scottish company: the United Films production of *Rob Roy* in 1911 (discussed in Chapter 7), which was released almost at the same time as Gaumont's 1911 *Rob Roy*, based on the legend rather than the novel. Competition was swift and ruthless. The mere production of a film did not guarantee that it would find an audience, particularly if it had to compete with a major international company.

The precariousness of early film production in Scotland is striking, and, given the popularity of cinema-going in Scotland, still defeats easy explanation. Caroline Merz gives a detailed and sympathetic account of Scottish attempts at production, with particular attention to the case of United Film's *Rob Roy*. Fundamentally, however, making films is difficult in a nation that does not have a large enough domestic audience to underwrite the risks of investment. This has been a historic problem for Britain as a whole, and for Scotland even more sharply. The result is that productions tend to be 'one-off' entrepreneurial ventures, dependent on the success or failure of a single film, and this does not provide the base on which an infrastructure can be built. Equally, investors and entrepreneurs in the period may have been more attracted to the apparent security of investing in exhibition, often on quite a grand and ambitious scale, than in the high-risk business of investing in production when the world market was increasingly dominated by the USA.

There are traces of film production companies being established in Ayr or in Montrose or in Aberdeen, and there are indications from trade reports in the Scottish Section of *The Bioscope* that they had got as far as beginning the filming of screenplays. In 1920, 'Scotty' reports on a film studio in Montrose in which C.F. Partoon, a Dundee photographer who had made a number of local topicals for Dundee cinemas, had produced what had the makings of a feature film, *The Greater Riches*, using a local writer and local actors, and filmed around Dundee and in a 'well-equipped' studio in

Montrose. Ever optimistic, ‘Scotty’, having read the scenario and on the basis of what he has already seen, predicts success: ‘the Trade may look with confidence to his first work, which will only lack one thing, and that is the stamp of amateurism’.<sup>24</sup> But then there is silence, later accompanied by disappointment: ‘By the way,’ says Scotty in December 1921, ‘what has come over that company that was producing in Dundee and Montrose? Are the pictures they partly took ever to be finished, or must the venture be written down as abandoned?’<sup>25</sup> It is hard to avoid the conclusion that exhibition was where profits were being made with a minimum amount of risk, and production from a small country in the English-speaking market where competition was fierce did not make economic sense.

What is in some ways equally interesting is the use of Scotland as a location for Scottish stories. In 1921, *The Bioscope* reports on a company established in Forres, in North-east Scotland, whose purpose was to market local landscape as film location:

stretches of sand dunes, suitable for desert scenes; hills and dales, woodland and charming river scenes of the Findhorn, and near at hand massive and beautiful rock formations which would delight the heart of any location manager.<sup>26</sup>

There is, unfortunately, no record of its success. A handful of films was made by English and American companies on Scottish locations: the various versions of *Rob Roy* seem to have been filmed in and around Aberfoyle; the 1923 *Bonnie Prince Charlie* was filmed in the accessible highlands of the island of Arran in the River Clyde; *Christie Johnstone* spent ten days filming in Auchmithie and its star, Stewart Rome, became a major celebrity in the neighbouring town of Arbroath; and *The Romany*, after considerable time spent researching gypsies by Victor McLagen, seems to have spent some time filming in and around Atholl. For *Robinson Crusoe*, however, there may or may not have been scenes in Largo showing his earlier life, and for *The Little Minister* in 1915 the only shots of Kirriemuir were of the Manse and the village well.

Film-makers visited Scotland to soak up atmosphere – ‘I have just been up to Scotland for atmosphere’, says Charles Calvert of his 1921 production *In His Grip*. ‘I can assure you it would have been impossible to get the Scotch atmosphere down here’, but, having secured the atmosphere, he shot the scenes in London.<sup>27</sup> For the practicalities of film-making, accessibility outweighed authenticity, and atmosphere could be created cinematically rather than reproduced photographically. The Highland seascape of Maurice Tourneur’s *The White Heather* (1919) was shot in Los Angeles harbour, and Jeanie Deans’s arduous journey to London in



*A Woman's Triumph* (1914) (a version of Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*) was shot in Cuba. Of *The White Heather*, says *The Bioscope*, 'The scenes in a spacious Scottish castle, the Highland exteriors and the wonderful London Stock Exchange interiors could scarcely have been better done in England.'<sup>28</sup> Or *Huntingtower* (1928), with Harry Lauder starring as Dickson McCunn, and with six Glasgow youths to play the Gorbals Diehards, set near Carrick in South-west Scotland in John Buchan's novel, was shot in the Cricklewood Studios in London and in Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland.

This move from authenticity to atmosphere, from photographic realism to constructed realism is significant aesthetically, but it is also important economically. A comparison with Ireland is instructive. In 1910, and again the following year, the Kalem company brought their crews and their inward investment to Ireland for a number of films that came to be known as the O'Kalems.<sup>29</sup> This inward investment did not happen in Scotland, and did not form the infrastructure on which something like a sustainable film industry could be built.

While adaptations in one form or another constitute almost half of the films which I have identified as Scottish, a little more than half are, as far as can be determined, original productions. These are films which have Scottish narratives, Scottish locations or prominent Scottish characters. Many of the films are set in Scotland, almost invariably in small towns and villages or in 'the Highlands'. The imaginary map of Scotland is one in which cities, urban life and industry are barely visible behind the hills and glens, villages and castles, peasantry and nobility of a geographically and historically dislocated 'Highlands'. At a time when Glasgow was one of the leading industrial cities in the world, accounting for twenty per cent of the world's shipbuilding, and with a heavy industry infrastructure to support it, we know of only two widely distributed films set or filmed in Glasgow: the locally produced comedy *Football Daft* (1921) and one episode of the Eddie Polo picaresque serial, *The Vanishing Dagger* (1920), which has one scene set in a Glasgow shipyard. Other films are set in London or the United States or Canada, tracking the diaspora with Scottish characters relocated to the American South or Canadian logger camps. Though the Scottish elements in many films seem incidental – *The Wolf* (Vitagraph, 1919), for example, is a set in a Canadian trapping camp – they are highlighted as distinctive in the trade reviews and synopses: *The Wolf's* plot is motivated by the 'cruel father' who 'typifies well the traditional Scottish male parent'.<sup>30</sup> Adopting a trade definition of Scottishness, these are films that have, in a sense, been 'Scotched'. As imaginary as the landscapes, 'Scotch' characters may be the stern and

unbending Presbyterian father who cannot adjust to new ways; the mother longing for her diasporic son, or the diasporic son longing for home; the dispossessed aristocrat seeking new money and a return to social dignity; or the winsome lass who may be the dispossessed aristocrat's best hope; or soldiers from the Highland, bagpipe-playing regiments, relieving towns under siege in the colonial wars (*The Campbells Are Coming* (1915)), or saving villages in the European war of 1914–18 (*Bravo Kilties!* (1914)): 'At the moment when our Scottish regiments are exciting universal admiration any film recording their prowess on the battlefield is certain of success.'<sup>31</sup>

Many of the US 'Scotch' films were not distributed in the UK or had limited release in Scotland. To the extent that these films were aimed at a folk memory it was not necessarily a Scottish folk memory. It is even worth considering that Scotland was not a good market for ersatz 'Scotch' films, or Scotch themes. *The Call of the Pipes* (1918) is advertised in the *Bo'ness Journal* as

All Scotch – Produced on the Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond  
Not an American idea of Scottish Scenery and Character,  
but the 'Real Mackay'.<sup>32</sup>

The appeal to the 'Real Mackay' suggests a recognition by the publicist of a clear and sceptical perception on the part of the audience of the 'unreal Mackay', imagined from the other side of the Atlantic.

The issue, then is not one of identity but of the way in which Scotland functioned in the imaginary; a question not just of the recognition or misrecognition on which subjectivity depends but of a refusal to recognise. Scotch locations, Scotch characters and Scotch narratives map Scotland's place within the international imagination both as a repository of the wildness of the Highlands – a European equivalent of the American West – or as a memory within a diasporic and urbanised culture of a lost past of the rural, the home, a vanishing and romanticised nobility, and a secure and simplified morality.

Finally, however, there is no very clear evidence that the failure to represent Scotland constituted a failure to meet demand. The really popular films in Scotland seem to have been Westerns, particularly Tom Mix, or Chaplin comedies, or serials. 'Scottish' films, however, like the 1911 *Rob Roy* that did claim to be made for Scots by Scots, do not appear to have enjoyed enough commercial success, even in Scotland, to sustain a stream of production. Scottish-produced films did not necessarily travel, and they often disappeared without trace outside the city-centre cinemas. For the Scottish experience of film-going, it may be that Scottish spectators,

who crowded the cinemas week after week, despite the attempts of the industry and the trade press to woo their support for British, if not Scottish cinema, would rather identify with Tom Mix or would rather be subject to the perils of Pauline. They would rather watch the sophisticated industrialisation of cinematic narrative, spectacle and stardom which the Hollywood studios were now perfecting than watch the occasional and sometimes quite amateur productions of a cinema that seemed to make every film as a one-off.

I am increasingly sceptical of the view that some of us took in the 1980s that the so-called deformities of Scottish popular culture represented, or were derivatives of, deformities in Scottish identity.<sup>33</sup> The evidence from the 1920s is that audiences were themselves sceptical, and were, on the one hand, drawn to the landscapes, but dismissive of the parodies of dress, language and custom with which Scotland was encrusted. Hollywood films of the American West seemed more up-to-date than films of the Scottish Highlands. At the same time, I am interested both in the continuities of the imaginary from literature to film, and in the ways in which cinema is caught in that ambivalence of modernity between the shock of the new and the desire for the past. As suggested in the previous chapter, and somewhat curiously, it is when one comes to look at the local topicals that are held in the National Library of Scotland's Moving Image Archive that cinema seems new again. It is in these local topicals, in the fascination of the amateurs with the new technology, in the experience of seeing their lives recorded, in the immediacy of their localities caught on film, in the commonplace and the everyday, that cinema, again, seems most modern.

### Notes

1. Moretti, *Distant Reading*, 67.
2. Moretti, *Distant Reading*, 48.
3. Pierce, *The Survival of American Silent Feature Films, 1912–1929*, 1.
4. *Bioscope*, 15 October 1925, p. 37.
5. *Bioscope*, 13 January 1924, p. v.
6. *Bioscope*, 1 February 1917, p. 507.
7. Emerson, 'Tribute to Walter Scott on the One Hundredth Anniversary of His Birthday, 15 August 1871'.
8. Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*. On Scott, see Chapter 46, 'Enchanters and Enchantment'.
9. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides*, 1772.
10. Johnson and Boswell, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*.
11. Burns, 'Journal of a Tour in the Highlands Made in the Year 1787'.

12. Diggle, 'Journal of a Tour from London to the Highlands of Scotland, 19 April–7 August 1788'.
13. Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*.
14. Victoria, *Queen Victoria's Highland Journals*.
15. Ardill and Imms, 'Tour of Scotland for Scott's Poetical Works 1831'.
16. Wordsworth, 'Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803. VII. Stepping Westward'.
17. Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, 87.
18. Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, 99.
19. Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, 88.
20. Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, 154.
21. Wordsworth, *Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland*, 48.
22. *Bioscope*, 16 June 1916, pp. 1042–5. This is the London trade show at the West End Cinema, Coventry Street.
23. 'British Film Weeks: Selling Angles for All Pictures', *Bioscope*, 3 January 1924, p. xii.
24. 'New Studios at Montrose: Production already commenced', *Bioscope*, 12 August 1920, pp. 78–9.
25. *Bioscope*, 8 December 1921, p. 73.
26. *Bioscope*, 30 June 1921, pp. 55–7.
27. 'Studio Notes', *Bioscope*, 26 May 1921, p. 45.
28. 'Criticism of the Films: The White Heather', *Bioscope*, 19 June 1919, 83.
29. See *The O'Kalem Collection, 1910–1915*, a DVD collection of eight Kalem films made in Ireland, including *Rory O'More* (1911) and *The Colleen Bawn* (1911), with an accompanying documentary *Blazing the Trail: The O'Kalems in Ireland* (Irish Film Institute and BIFF Productions, 2011).
30. 'The Wolf', *Moving Picture World*, 16 August 1919, p. 1023. Via *Media History Digital Library*, <http://archive.org/stream/movingpicturewor41chal>
31. 'Bravo Kilties!', *Bioscope*, 12 November 1914, p. 668.
32. *Bo'ness Journal*, 8 March 1918.
33. See, for example, McArthur, *Scotch Reels* – to which the present author contributed.